

What is claimed is:

1 1. A method for confirming that a recipient of an information-bearing
2 notification has received and read the notification comprising:
3 receiving the information-bearing notification from a sender of the notification;
4 presenting the information-bearing notification, including a presenting a word
5 sequence, to the recipient;
6 accepting an audio input in response to presenting the word sequence;
7 determining whether the accepted audio input includes the recipient speaking the
8 presented word sequence; and
9 if the accepted audio includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence,
10 transmitting a confirmation to the sender of the notification.

1 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising determining whether the
2 accepted audio input includes the voice of an intended recipient, and transmitting the
3 confirmation to the sender if the accepted audio both includes the recipient speaking the
4 presented word sequence and the accepted audio includes the voice of the intended
5 recipient.

1 3. The method of claim 1 wherein presenting the word sequence to the
2 recipient includes presenting a graphical representation of the word sequence.

1 4. The method of claim 3 wherein presenting the graphical representation of
2 the word sequence includes presenting said graphical representation on a display.

1 5. The method of claim 1 wherein presenting the word sequence to the
2 recipient includes presenting an audible representation of the word sequence.

1 6. The method of claim 5 wherein presenting the audible representation of
2 the word sequence includes playing a stored audio recording of the word sequence.

1 7. The method of claim 5 wherein presenting the audible representation of
2 the word sequence includes applying a speech synthesis algorithm to the word sequence
3 to form the audible representation.

1 8. The method of claim 5 wherein presenting the audible representation of
2 the word sequence includes transmitting the audible representation over a telephone
3 network and accepting the audio response includes receiving the audio response over the
4 telephone network.

1 9. The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether the accepted audio
2 input includes the recipient speaking the word sequence includes applying a speech
3 recognition algorithm to the accepted audio input.

1 10. The method of claim 9 wherein applying the speech recognition algorithm
2 includes computing a resulting word sequence from the audio input and determining
3 whether the audio input includes the recipient speaking the word sequence includes
4 comparing the resulting word sequence to the word sequence of the notification.

1 11. The method of claim 9 wherein applying the speech recognition algorithm
2 includes time-aligning the word sequence of the notification and the audio input.

1 12. The method of claim 9 wherein applying the speech recognition algorithm
2 includes computing a match score characterizing a similarity between the word sequence
3 and the audio input.

1 13. The method of claim 12 wherein determining whether the audio input
2 includes the recipient speaking the word sequence includes comparing the match score
3 with a threshold score.

1 14. The method of claim 1 wherein accepting the audio input includes
2 accepting a plurality of segments of the audio input each associated with a different part
3 of the word sequence of the notification, and wherein determining whether the accepted
4 audio input includes the recipient speaking the word sequence includes determining
5 whether each of the plurality of segments of the audio input includes the recipient
6 speaking the associated part of the word sequence.

1 15. The method of claim 14 wherein presenting the word sequence includes
2 presenting each of the different parts of the word sequence in turn and accepting the
3 audio input associated with that part before presenting another of the different parts.

1 16. A method for forming a contract between a first party and a second party
2 comprising:
3 offering terms of the contract to the second party, including presenting a word
4 sequence to the second party;
5 accepting an audio input from the second party in response to offering the terms
6 of the contract;
7 determining whether the accepted audio input includes the second party speaking
8 the presented word sequence;
9 informing the first party if the audio input includes the second party speaking the
10 word sequence.

1 17. The method of claim 16 wherein determining whether the accepted audio
2 input includes the second party speaking the presented word sequence includes applying
3 a speech recognition algorithm to the accepted audio input to determine a word sequence
4 present in the audio input.

1 18. The method of claim 16 wherein determining whether the accepted audio
2 input includes the second party speaking the presented word sequence includes applying
3 a speaker recognition algorithm to the accepted audio input to compare voice
4 characteristics of an intended party with whom the first party desires to form a contract
5 and voice characteristics present in the audio input.

1 19. The method of claim 16 wherein offering the terms of the contract
2 includes display a text representation of the terms to the second party on a computer
3 display.

1 20. Software stored on computer readable media for causing a computer
2 system to perform functions including:
3 receiving an information-bearing notification from a sender of the notification;
4 presenting the information-bearing notification, including a presenting a word
5 sequence, to the recipient;
6 accepting an audio input in response to presenting the word sequence;
7 determining whether the accepted audio input includes the recipient speaking the
8 presented word sequence; and
9 if the accepted audio includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence,
10 transmitting a confirmation to the sender of the notification.

1 21. The software of claim 20 wherein the software further causes the
2 computer system to perform functions including determining whether the accepted audio
3 input includes the voice of an intended recipient, and transmitting the confirmation to the
4 sender if the accepted audio both includes the recipient speaking the presented word
5 sequence and the accepted audio includes the voice of the intended recipient.

1 22. An automated notification confirmation system comprising:
2 means for receiving an information-bearing notification from a sender of the
3 notification;
4 means for presenting the information-bearing notification, including a presenting
5 a word sequence, to the recipient;
6 means for accepting an audio input in response to presenting the word sequence;
7 means for determining whether the accepted audio input includes the recipient
8 speaking the presented word sequence; and
9 means for transmitting a confirmation to the sender of the notification if the
10 accepted audio includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence.

1 23. The automated system of claim 22 further comprising means for
2 determining whether the accepted audio input includes the voice of an intended recipient,
3 and means for transmitting the confirmation to the sender if the accepted audio both
4 includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence and the accepted audio
5 includes the voice of the intended recipient.

6

1